4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
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Johns Island

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Mrs. Betsy Pinckney

DON'T LET THE RAIN CATCH YOU

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I remember in 1907 we had a tornado on Saxby place. I stand in my door, and my grandma say, "I going now." And I say, "Yes'm, Grandma, I see you going. Don't let the rain catch you." And you know, the wind pick up the house, just as natural as that. And it carry 'em about two tasks [a task is twenty-one rows in a field]. And my grandma lay down on the stomach and hold on to the wire fence, to the post. Yessir, I know that! And I there home whooping and hollering, "Oh Lord, that big air cloud carry Grandma!" That's right!

[804]

We had another storm in 1911. I cook peas and rice that day. It was a Sunday. Josh was laying 'cross the bed sleeping. I lean against that post and every time I feel that house shake, I say "Josh, get up. You better get up and see he going to storm." You see, I had seen one. Done gone 'cross one in 1886.

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
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[461]

Tetch, for remnant. "T'engk Gawd, 'e lef' uh leetle tetch een de bottle."

Tas' (*task*), one hundred and five feet square, one quarter of an acre, the daily task on sea-island cotton plantations.[a] Used now as either a measure of area or of distance. "My gun kin shoot two tas'," i.e. 210 feet or 70 yards.

Use in the sense of "frequent certain feeding grounds, be accustomed to go, linger habitually about."[b]

Yowe for ewe.

Frail, to strike, to beat.

Ax for ask.[c]

Piggin, a small cedar pail with one panel extended for a handle.

Pyo' for "pure," in the sense of "fully, absolutely"; modern slang, "nothing else but": *de pyo' nutt'n*.

Staa't-naked, instead of "stark-naked."[d]

Quile for coil.

Find, in the sense of "to supply with victuals." "Buh Sun promise Buh Fowl-hawk fuh fine um een bittle effn 'e ketch 'im een 'im baid."

Quills, still used for pipes of reed or cane.

Shote, for young hog.

Killick, for "killock," an anchor of stone.

Gaul for swamp.

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[a] Mr. Bennett explains a "task" as one-half an acre for a hoe hand; three-quarters of an acre for a cotton-field hand; one-quarter of an acre for a rice-field hand. Thus a man and his family can *cut a tass; tie a tass, an' carry a tass intuh de flat*. From this comes the phrase, *a done-tass niggah*, for a worn out laborer, too weak or too old to work; or lightly, for the laughing darkey, his day's work done and his hoe canted over his shoulder. I. 343.

[b] Widely employed throughout the South by both white and black, usually as a hunting term in connection with doves, partridges, and turkeys. Dignified Elizabethan. Compare Spenser's "Where never foot did use", and Milton's Lycidas,

"Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use,
Of shades and wanton winds and gushing brooks."

Listed along with *quile* (coil) and *gaum* as colloquial white usage by Charles Foster Smith in "Southern Dialect in Life and Literature," *The Southern Bivouac*, Nov., 1885.

[c] Good Chaucerian and Caxtonian; standard English till 1600; still used in the Midland and Southern Dialects in England; and in general much easier and pleasanter to say than "ask".

[d] It is barely possible (but highly improbable) that *staa't* goes back to the older "start" (steort), tail.

10: Johnson S-4,5 (no date) 1930
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192 comment, "It is barely possible (but highly improbable) that *staa't* goes back to the older 'start' (steort), tail." But the *N. E. D.* states that *stark-naked* is an alteration of the older *start-naked*, i. e., *tail-naked*, and lists various usages from the 13th century down to recent times. *Start-naked* would then seem to be a direct descendant of the Anglo-Saxon *steort* after all.

Stepney, poverty, privation. "To keep ol' stepney from de do'," is to keep the wolf from the door. Not heard on St. Helena. Smith lists this word as possibly African, which is doubtful. *Stepney* is used in a restricted area,[97a] and it might represent an English usage which has never been noted in any dialect collection. The following is ventured as a possible explanation of the origin of the usage. *Stepney* is the name of an east London parish in which squalor and poverty prevail. *(Ency. Brit.)* *Stepney* or *stipone*, "a kind of sweet compound liquor drunk in some ill places in London in the summer time," (See Grose, *Classical Dict.*, and Wright, *Prov. Dict.*) probably took its name from the parish (See *N. E. D.*). It appears from this that *stepney* was associated with a low condition. Add to this the fact that it is used synonymously with *wolf* in "keep the wolf from de do'," and its English derivation seems fairly certain.

Swinge, to singe. Widely used by Negroes and by the white mountain people. Still in use in various parts of England.

Swanga (or *swonga)*, noun: swagger, a dashing air; adj.: swaggering, boastful, etc. This word has been considered African by certain writers, but it is quite possibly a dialect pronunciation of English *swank* or *swanky*, the latter being used as both noun and adjective with meanings that correspond to those of *swanga*, namely, "a strapping fellow" and "swaggering." (*Prov. Dict.* or *E. D. D.*). A parallel is found in the Gullah *teng* or *tang* for *thank*.

[804] *Task*, a survival of the plantation daily task of a quarter of an acre for each hand. It is also used as a linear measure (105 feet).

[97a] Since this was written Arthur Palmer Hudson has informed me that *stepney* is known in Mississippi.

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The Negro speaks of planting two *tas'* of potatoes, or judges that the river is about a *tas'* wide.

Titty (or tittuh), sister.

Toad, a young female dog.

Too, very. "I *too* sorry you gwine." "Lawd, dat gatuh *too* beeg!" exclaimed a Negro who was rowing me across the Edisto when he saw a large alligator near the boat. Also used in this sense by white people in the low country.

Tote, to carry.[98] This word, which is still widely used in the United States, has been the cause of much controversy. Some have attributed it to the Negro, others to the Indian. The English derivation seems so simple that it is not necessary to look elsewhere. In the South, where this word seems to have been used first in this country, *tote* means not merely to carry, but it implies "hefting," supporting or carrying something heavy. When *tote* began to get spread about by newspapers and periodicals, it was taken up by many people who did not appreciate its correct usage, and soon we were *toting* such light objects as books, papers, pistols, etc. This extension of the meaning of *tote* explains the reluctance of some scholars to accept an English derivation.

Totian, an Anglo-Saxon verb, has survived in England in various shades of meaning, the most common of which is to peep, to look out. Hence *tot hill*, a lookout place. *Tolt*, from Latin *tolle*,[99] to lift or remove, is probably the immediate precursor of our *tote* if not identical with it. The *E. D. D.* lists as one of the meanings of *tolt*, "to tilt, to raise up," cites a Warwickshire example, "Tolt it up a bit," and states that *tolt* is also

[98] The earliest written use of *tote* found in the U. S. is in a Virginia manuscript, 1677: "They were by Beverly comanded to go to work, fall trees and mawl and toat railes." Quoted in R. W. Green's *Virginia Word-Book*, also in *New English Dictionary*.

It is interesting to observe that in a grammar written by Rev. Brantley York (3rd ed., 1862) and used locally in North Carolina, "tote the wood" was listed as an Irish inaccuracy for "carry the wood" in a list of New England, Dutch, Irish, and general colloquial inaccuracies.

[99] *Tolt* is the name of a writ by which proceedings were removed or "lifted" from the Court Baron to County Court. See any good law dictionary.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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The basis of work on a sea-island cotton plantation was the task. In time the term came to signify a quarter of an acre laid out 105 by 105 feet. The acre was laid out square, 210 by 210 feet. A day's work for a full hand depended upon the time of year and the kind of work he was doing. When listing, the full hand's task was a quarter of an acre. Listing was the first process of preparing the land for cotton after the field had been manured, and consisted of hoeing the grass off the old bed into the alleys. Next the old beds were hauled on top at the rate of a quarter of an acre a day to the full hand. When a plow was used, as it seldom was, the hands followed with hoes, finishing off the beds at the rate of three tasks a day, or three-fourths of an acre. A plowman's allotment was usually four tasks, or an acre a day.

When the bed had been made, two hands made holes the width of the hoe cross-wise on the top of it at intervals of about eighteen inches. Another hand followed, scattering ten or fifteen seeds in each hole, while two other hands covered them to a depth of about an inch and a half, patting the soil down. Since this was light work the day's assignment in this process was usually three tasks.

A day's work at hoeing after the cotton came up was ordinarily two tasks. Picking, which was done generally by the women and children, was accomplished at the rate of about ninety to a hundred pounds a day for a full hand. The task at assorting was from thirty to fifty pounds of seed cotton a day, at ginning from twenty to thirty pounds a day, at moting from thirty to fifty pounds a day.

The tasks involved in plantation work as laid down

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for Weehaw plantation near Georgetown, which were also observed on St. Helena plantations, were as follows:[21]

Corn: Sowing done in gang. Covering done in gang.
Hoeing ¼ acre Hauling up ½ acre.
Plowing corn 2½ to 3 acres; a man & mule will tend 30 acres. Stripping fodder ¾ acre on first day—after that strip 1 acre & carry home that of the previous day.

Potatoes & Slips:
Planting—3 [hands] in a ¼ acre, who also bed it up.
Hoeing—2 in a ¼ acre. Hauling up 20 Compass.[22]
Digging slips—men, 5 rows—Women, 4 rows & carry home.
Digging roots for allowance—5 to 7 rows, as they bear.
Weeding is usually done by the shufflers.[23]

Peas: 3 hands to 3 acres when planted between corn.
Harvesting—2 large blankets.

Ditching . . . 6 to 8 tasks. Spreading straw[24]—if wet ½ acre. if dry ¾ acre. Listing in straw—½ acre.

Getting task stakes, 500 to a hand[25]

Splitting Rails—100 Rails 12 ft long & heavy

Cutting Wood—1 cord. . . .

Splitting garden railings—500 to 3 men. . . .

Cutting down & piling up corn stalks, 1 to 1¼ to 1½ acres.

Digging ditches . . . —600 cubic feet.

The tasks at cutting marsh grass and digging marsh mud for fertilizing the fields were estimated by the cart load and varied with the weather and the distance of the marsh from the field.

[21] Henry A. Middleton, Jr., Weehaw Plantation Book.
[22] A compass was five feet as measured by a wooden triangle called a compass.
[23] Children or superannuated men and women.
[24] On St. Helena plantations marsh grass was used instead of the rice straw spread on the Weehaw fields.
[25] Each hand's task was staked off.

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